

## **Two area teachers GEMS selections Low-income, minorities to benefit from gifted program**

JOANIE BAKER, The Daily News, [jbaker@bgdailynews.com](mailto:jbaker@bgdailynews.com)/783-3234  
Published: December 30, 2008

The physics and chemistry lab housed in his father's classroom sparked an early interest and fascination with science for David Baxter.

Now Baxter, a teacher at Cumberland Trace Elementary School, will have the opportunity to spark that desire in other students.

Baxter and Allison Bemiss, a teacher at Briarwood Elementary School, were selected recently as teachers of the Gifted Education in Math and Science Program.

The program was developed with a five-year, \$2 million grant received by Western Kentucky University in an effort to reach about 120 low-income and minority students who have an interest or talent in math, science, technology or engineering.

In February, the selected students will begin taking problem-based math and science classes in the new Warren County Schools academic/aquatic center on Lovers Lane.

Baxter and Bemiss will be responsible for fostering the children's desire to continue life-long learning.

Bemiss said she believes the logo she and Baxter developed for GEMS, a torch, is a good representation of what the program is all about.

"William Butler said education is not the filling of a pail but the lighting of a fire," she said. "We want to light that fire and get them inquiring about problem-based learning."

The problem-based learning curriculum is designed by the Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act, which funded the grant to The Center for Gifted Studies at WKU.

The grant was one of only seven in the country and established a partnership between WKU and Warren County Public Schools to reach elementary schools that qualify at least 50 percent of their students for free or reduced lunch.

Julia Roberts, executive director for The Center for Gifted Studies, said Baxter and Bemiss have participated in a 12-hour gifted studies program through WKU and were an easy selection for the program.

"They are both very flexible in their thinking and are excellent teachers," Roberts said. "We're focusing on problem-based math and science, and their ability to teach math and science and be looking at new strategies is very attractive."

While both teachers said it was difficult to leave their schools before winter break, they are looking forward to the unique opportunity to develop a new program and work with students.

Bemiss explained that problem-based learning may involve giving the students a scenario – such as a chemical spill in Bowling Green – and having them conduct scientific experiments and research for weeks to resolve the problem.

Bemiss, who has taught at Briarwood for six years, said she had focused on literacy and working with students who were struggling with reading and decided she needed to turn her focus to another group of students whose needs are not always met and who need more advocates.

"There is a focus on students who are struggling ... but there is a misconception that gifted students can do it on their own and that's not the case," she said. "We are taking students with a high interest in math and science and pushing them to where they wouldn't be if they didn't have this opportunity and I feel we will do that."

Baxter said while it was difficult to leave his classroom of 14 years, he is looking forward to having the opportunity to use some of the more hands-on science and math lessons that may not always be available in a normal classroom.

Having grown up around his father's lab, Baxter said it will be easy to get students intrigued in the areas because they will have access to labs or tools that will allow them to do experiments rather than just learn from a textbook.

Baxter said he sees the position as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

"You really want what's best for every child, and you always want that, but I think this endorsement really reaches out to those students," he said.

The teachers said while the cement dries on the academic/aquatic center, they will have about a month to plan and design their new center to make it attractive and fun.

"We try to think if we were 10 years old what would we want to see," Baxter said. "When they walk in, we want them just excited to be there from the time they step in the door and we want them to be excited about learning."

Copyright 2008 News Publishing LLC (Bowling Green, KY)